

The Macedonian Struggle 1903-1912. Paving the Way for the Liberation

Basil K. Gounaris

1. From the 1897 Catastrophe to the Ilinden Uprising

The Greek defeat in 1897 inevitably marked a turning point in the evolution of the Macedonian Question. The shattering military defeat, the overwhelming economic problems, the imposition of international economic control, coupled with the devastating blow to the morale of the whole nation (and especially the army), provoked a severe domestic crisis and a revision of Greek foreign policy. The shock waves generated by this national disaster were naturally felt in Macedonia. It was deemed necessary to put an end to the activities of the *Ethniki Etaireia* (which was considered, and not unreasonably, to be partially responsible for the country's premature entanglement in military operations) until spirits could be pacified at home and abroad. In response to powerful pressure from the Theotokis government the Society was dissolved in 1900, although its members remained in close terms.¹

The departure of the Greek armed bands, which had only made their first serious appearance in 1896, at the behest of the *Ethniki Etaireia*, tilted the balance in favour of Bulgarian, Serbian and Romanian propaganda, which moved swiftly to fill the gap left by the Greek withdrawal. Thus the Greek communities in Macedonia were once again exposed to an onerous situation, having been deprived of not only the minimal protection of the Greek state, but also the slightest solicitude on the part of the Ottoman authorities. The greatest danger, of course, came from Bulgaria, which proceeded to adopt a policy of undisguised aggression. The favourable (for Greece) progress of the Cretan Question suggested to the leaders of the Bulgarian Principality that Macedonia was a logical territorial adjunct. In fact, as we have already seen, Bulgarian penetration had already made significant gains in northern Macedonia during this decade,

so that Bulgaria's hopes of eventually prevailing were not unfounded.

Although irredentism in Greece had somewhat subsided, in Bulgaria in 1897 the various Macedonian committees were more active than ever. The Supreme Macedonian Committee (*Vrhoven Komitet*) even issued patriotic bonds in support of Bulgarian efforts in Macedonia, payable when the revolution achieved its aims. The issue was widely advertised, and purchase of the bonds was compulsory, even for the Greeks in the Principality. By the following year, under the dynamic leadership of Boris Sarafov and with the full support of the Bulgarian government, the influx of armed bands into Macedonia redoubled. Usually consisting of ten men, these bands were largely formed of Bulgarians of Macedonian descent, some soldiers, some civilians, who had recently settled in the Principality and belonged for the most part to the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, or IMRO. The aim of these guerrilla bands was on the one hand to organize local revolutionary committees and armed cells, and on the other to prepare the economic and psychological groundwork for the revolution.²

In practice, however, things were not as easy as the instigators of this plan wished to believe. The initial idea of the founders of IMRO, Gruev and Tatarchev, that is, the enlistment in their movement of anyone of any nationality who desired to take part in a quasi-socialist revolt against the Turks, gradually proved impracticable. The overwhelming majority of the Greeks had been suspicious of the Bulgarian movements right from the outset. Moreover, the mini-uprising of 1895 had already shown that in the eyes of the Bulgarian *komitadjis* (i.e. members of the *Komitet* bands) there was very little



A 1904 photograph of the first nationalist organization of the Macedonian Struggle, the "Fraternity of the Friends of the Poor of Gevgeli".

difference between Greek and Turkish aims.³ Inevitably, then, IMRO's struggle served to foment the by now traditional conflict between Exarchists and Patriarchists, and the movement naturally sought support solely from the former party. The movement was further reinforced by means of acts of terrorism against the leading figures of the Greek community in Macedonia, support for Exarchist schools and churches, forced levies from the Slav-speaking Patriarchists, and the conversion of some of the traditional *klephts*, who offered their considerable experience to this unorthodox war.⁴

Eventually, and despite Greek resistance, the balance-sheet at the end of the two-year period 1898-1900 was probably in favour of the Bulgarians. They had two very capable leaders, Poptraikov and Pavel Christov, who helped organize armed cells in the Kastoria region; and the murder of several tax collectors and tax farmers established the movement's credentials as a tyrannicide. Internal strife within the Greek communities, as well as the questionable practices of some of the ecclesiastical representatives of the Patriarchate, also helped push some of the oppressed residents of the middle zone into the Exarchist camp.⁵

The formation of these cells continued into the early years of the 20th century, while the simultaneous arming of Exarchist peasants was accelerated. Some of these arms had been purchased in Athens with Bulgarian funds, and had been dispatched into the Turkish-held provinces by way of Larisa and Trikkala, via a carefully organized network whose chief agents were Vlachs. The authorities on the Greek and Turkish borders were alerted, however, and this traffic was stopped before it

could become a serious problem. Furthermore, the Bulgarian units had by now grown to such an extent that they could openly challenge the Turkish army, which indeed gradually began to take action, the most significant battle between the two forces taking place in February 1902. In addition, the constant representations of the European states to the Bulgarian government constrained it to refuse IMRO its open support; they were, however, unable to impose its dissolution.⁶

The Bulgarian organization would certainly have been able to accomplish even more if it had not been torn by internal strife. First of all, there was serious friction between local Slav-speaking chieftains and IMRO officials. To a great extent this was a reflection of the refusal of the Slav-speaking Kota Christou from Rulia (Kota) to fight against the Greeks under the command of the Bulgarian Markov, who was a newcomer to Western Macedonia (1900), and his subsequent gradual estrangement from the Bulgarian committee.

Just when open conflict between Kota and IMRO seemed inevitable (August 1902), Major Jagov arrived with an armed unit at Zagoritsani (Vasileiada), in Western Macedonia, as the principal agent of the Supreme Macedonian Committee and personal representative of the President, Ivan Tsonchev. His goal was to instigate an uprising as soon as possible, with the promise of open Bulgarian and Russian support. The local chieftains, Tsakalarov, Kliasev, Mitros Vlachos, and others, were opposed to this idea, contending that the region was unprepared. The supply of arms, for example, and despite all Tsakalarov's efforts, had shrunk as a result of the Turkish army's intensive search-

ches in 1901-02. Jagov did not abandon his plans, but threatened to turn to Kota instead; he also accused Tsakalarov of embezzling IMRO funds. Tsakalarov's reaction was spirited: he flung the accusations back at Jagov, and even tried to collect some of the arms that had been distributed to the peasants. The tide seemed to have turned against Jagov, but he did not give up.

However, in spite of these leadership clashes, the activity of the Bulgarian bands all over Macedonia, with every imaginable sort of pressure and violence against the Greek population, continued relentlessly throughout 1902, raising the spectre of imminent revolution and provoking redoubled activity on the part of the Turkish army. The possibility of the complete disintegration of the revolutionary infrastructure was now a daily reality, and there were certainly Bulgarian chieftains who were ready to lay down their arms at a moment's notice; it is also true that there was a general absence of co-ordination.

These were the circumstances that Tsonchev and Jagov were attempting to exploit, in prosecution of the wishes of the Supreme Macedonian Committee. Towards the end of 1902 the former appeared in the Razlog-Djumaja area at the head of a band of 300 men, and with the help of local units tried to incite an uprising against the Turks. Jagov, for his part, was proclaiming the revolution in Western Macedonia. These efforts were doomed from the outset, of course, since they did not have the approval of Sarafov and Gruev. This did not worry their perpetrators, however, whose sole concern was to create as many nests of revolution as possible in order to provoke violent Turkish intervention, and to promote the concept of Macedonian autonomy on the international scene. In reality, very few villages in the Djuma-Bala-Melenikon and Edessa-Gevgeli areas joined the movement, and none voluntarily. The critical battle was fought at the Kresna Pass. In spite of heavy losses, the Turkish army managed to capture the *komitadji* positions and force their defenders to withdraw. The Turkish advance was accompanied by atrocities on the part of certain Albanian units and some Bashibazuks, who indulged their predilection for rapine and arson. These incidents, suitably inflated by the Bulgarian and foreign press, succeeded in attracting the attention of European public opinion; and from this point of view, which was what really interested the Bulgarian Principality, the uprising can be considered a success.⁷

In order to make the European position comprehen-

sible, a brief outline of the balance of power connected with the Eastern Question at the end of the 19th century is necessary. In 1897 Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy had concluded a two-fold treaty defining their spheres of influence in the Balkans and upholding the *status quo*. This of course did not mean that they had abandoned their designs in the area, and so while Austria-Hungary intensified its pursuit of economic penetration in the eastern side of the peninsula, towards Thessaloniki, Russia seized the opportunity to present itself as the just and natural protector of Serbia and Bulgaria. Meanwhile, although British interest in preserving the Ottoman Empire was waning, the Sublime Porte had found a new ally in Germany, which was beginning to play a more dynamic role on the international scene.⁸

Such being the situation, then, the first sequels to the internationalization of the Macedonian Question were not long in appearing. The IMRO had already paved the way with a memorandum to the Great Powers in January 1899 demanding a settlement of the Macedonian Question along the lines of that applied to the Cretan Question (1898). Four years after the refusal of the powers to accept the memorandum, the Bulgarian government was able to claim outright that Turkish brutality was sending streams of emigrants to the Principality, resuscitating irredentism and endangering peace in the Balkans. The curbing of the Bulgarian revolutionary committees, so imperiously demanded by the Europeans, was impossible without some reform in the Balkan provinces. Late in November 1902 the Porte, in a combination of deference to international pressure and pursuit of its own dilatory policy. Appointed Hilmi Husein Pasha Governor-General of the European *vilayets*, with a mandate to restore normalcy to Macedonia.⁹

By the end of the year it was obvious that the new measures were no improvement on existing legislation, and that the situation demanded the direct intervention of the Great Powers. In a joint declaration from Vienna in December 1902, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Lambsdorff, and his Austrian counterpart, Count Goluchowski, suggested the introduction of a specific programme of reforms on the *vilayets* of Thessaloniki, Monastir and Kosovo. These measures, known as the 'Vienna Programme', included the appointment of an Inspector-General to the Macedonian *vilayets* for a period of three years, with military as well as administrative authority, the reorganization of the gendarmerie under foreign officers, the admission of

Christians to the gendarmerie and the rural guard, and amnesty for political offences. Financial stipulations included separate budgets for each *vilayet*, tithe collection by village rather than by region, and honest management of revenues. By February 1903 this programme had been approved by all the Great Powers; for the Porte, objection was neither possible nor desirable. Actual application of the measures, however, was another matter. Despite initial enthusiasm from the Porte and the co-operative attitude of the Inspector-General (Hilmi), the overwhelming technical difficulties, combined with growing anarchy, soon put an end to any attempt at reform.¹⁰

Indeed, as 1902 approached its close, the Turkish army's mopping-up operations slowed down, while the great majority of released political detainees moved straight from the jails to the mountains. Pressures on Patriarchists increased, especially in the northern areas. Forced levies and violence were once again a daily reality, while the ever-growing armed bands of Bulgarians made their presence felt constantly. In Western Macedonia the number of armed revolutionaries jumped from 700 to 1,200. In the spring of 1903, there were some 2,700 armed *komitadjis* in Macedonia, organized into about 90 bands. Arms-gathering and other material preparations were once again proceeding rapidly and everything seemed to indicate that Macedonia was on the brink of yet another revolutionary explosion. The bombings of railway stations and telegraph lines that occurred in late March and early April convinced the Turkish authorities that something serious was in the wind.¹¹

Their suspicions were confirmed when Thessaloniki was hit by a wave of bombings at the end of April. The perpetrators were members of a small group of anarchists which maintained casual links with IMRO, and their goal was to focus European attention on the future of Macedonia. This was why their targets were shops and services with direct or indirect European connections, such as the Ottoman Bank, the steamship *Guadalquivir*, the Turkish Post Office, and selected coffee shops, clubs and hotels. Although at the time the Bulgarian organization was blamed for the bombings, in fact these were completely unrelated to the spate of incidents in the countryside. In any case, the rapid intervention of the foreign consuls shielded the citizens of Thessaloniki from brutal reprisals.

In the Macedonian countryside the Bulgarian bands



A demonstration in Thessaloniki in 1903, in protest against Bulgarian actions.

continued their active and varied campaign, seeking to stir up revolutionary fervour against the Turks; this time, however, they insisted more on the social aspect of the movement, telling the peasants that when the revolution was successful the *chiflik* lands would be redistributed. While Thessaloniki was rocking from the bomb explosions, the Bulgarian leaders were gathered at Smilevo, near Prespes. The meeting was attended by the secretary general of the Supreme Macedonian Committee, Damien Gruev, and Boris Sarafov, who was very critical of the Committee's strategy—immediate revolution—in view of the actual state of preparations. He also pointed out, though, that the independent and ill-considered bomb attacks in Thessaloniki had alerted the Turkish army, and that what preparations they had already made might well be discovered if the insurrection were not speedily organized and carefully carried out. This point of view was supported by other leaders, who realised that they must act while the initiative still lay with them. The views of the Committee, then, which was acting in close liaison with the Bulgarian Ministry for

War, were adopted, and preparations for the revolution were set in hand. Nevertheless, the decisive influence of the Vrhovists and the overt support of Bulgaria notwithstanding, the revolutionary machine was still in the hands of IMRO, which continued to mislead the local population by brandishing the slogan "Macedonia to the Macedonians".

In the meanwhile, the Turkish army had commenced a new round of mopping-up operations, of which the most important took place at Smardesi (Krystalopigi). A band of Bulgarians under Antonov were trapped in the village when a sizable Turkish force of both regular and irregular soldiers encircled it; they did in the end manage to escape, but the village was almost completely destroyed: 85 dead, 50 wounded, 230 houses out of a total of 300 burned, and almost all the animals lost. This incident was not unique; nor were its corollaries slow to appear. By now the consequences of any abortive insurrection were perfectly clear, and the peasants had every reason to be wary of IMRO. The latter, however, was not about to let any such obstacles impede its course: it had long since developed quite effective methods for ensuring the support of the peasants –willing or otherwise.

Frequent skirmishes with the Turkish army did not slow down the steady growth of the Bulgarian guerrilla bands, which were constantly being reinforced by arrivals from the Principality. IMRO's battle to amass sufficient men, food, money and equipment led to an orgy of blackmail, forced levies and violence against the Patriarchist population which neither the local Greek leaders nor the Turkish authorities were able to stop. Early in July, when preparations were well under way, the date of the insurrection known as the Ilinden Uprising was fixed for July 20, the feast day of Prophet Elijah.

The events which followed, over the rest of that year, do not really merit the title of revolution. The principal aim of the Bulgarian guerrilla bands was to drive as much of the population as possible into the mountains in order to create the impression of a broadly-based movement with adherents from various classes and nationalities. Military action was restricted to Western and Northern Macedonia. The relentless searches for arms and the undiminished presence of the army in the rest of the territory made diversionary action impossible, while absolutely no revolutionary activity took place in the southern, Greek-speaking zone. The insurrection had two operational goals: on the one hand to prevent Turkish reinforcements from reaching the main theatre

of operations in time, and on the other to seize certain secondary administrative centres, such as Krushevo (Krousovon), Kleisoura, and Neveska (Nymphaion), which did in fact fall to the insurgents and were endowed with 'revolutionary committees'. No attacks were made on urban centres like Monastir, Florina or Amyntaion. A number of bridges were destroyed and railroad tracks bombed. The bands also laid waste certain *chifliks* and murdered a number of Turkish landowners and government officials. Several of the Greek notables also fell victim to the insurgents, while others were obliged to seek refuge in the cities.

Despite the damage to roads and railways, the Turks quickly assembled sufficient forces to put down the rebellion. The troops they used were levied from the Albanian territories, and their ranks included many of the second reserves who were renowned for their lack of discipline, as well as a fair number of Bashibazuks. Krushevo was retaken in mid-August and consigned to the flames. The Greek quarter suffered the most damage, and many Greeks lost their lives. Similar scenes were repeated in most of the villages in the 'insurgent' territories. By the end of August the rebellion had collapsed, although scattered skirmishes occurred throughout September and more rarely in October. In fact, towards the end of September the Vrhovists under Tsonchev and Jagov attempted to spark a new revolt in the area around Razlog, in Eastern Macedonia, using Bulgarian troops exclusively. IMRO, however, refused to support them; and the Turks, after defeating the insurgents in Western Macedonia were easily able to detach troops for the new front. Within a week the Bulgarian units had retreated into Bulgaria.

In that summer of 1903, a total of 22 villages were completely destroyed and many more suffered serious damage, leaving 40,000 people homeless. The bulk of the damage was to the Greek and Vlach Patriarchist communities in the areas around Florina, Monastir and Kastoria. For the Bulgarian side, the balance-sheet at first glance appeared negative. The revolutionary machine which had been built up with such difficulty had been severely damaged and never really managed to recover. Nevertheless, once again there had been significant gains on the diplomatic front. Although the movement had failed to persuade the Great Powers to agree on an immediate solution for the Macedonian Question, much less its preferred option of autonomy, nonetheless Turkish violence had been sufficiently

widely publicized in the press to give new urgency to plans for reform in Macedonia.¹²

During this period (1897-1903) the Greek government, unable to intervene openly on behalf of the Greeks in Macedonia, engaged in an unrewarding effort to improve its diplomatic position on the international scene as well as within the Balkans in order to counteract Bulgarian headway. One such attempt was a series of negotiations with Serbia in 1899 in an attempt to establish spheres of influence in Macedonia. Unfortunately the intervention of Russia, which stepped in to settle Serbia's differences with Bulgaria, upset this plan, although a Greek-Serbian rapprochement seems unlikely to have succeeded in any case. Generally speaking, Greek-Serbian co-habitation in northern Macedonia was anything but comfortable in the period 1898-1903, but conflict was restricted to religious and educational matters. Also unsuccessful was the attempt to approach Romania, despite a meeting between Kings George I of the Hellenes and Carol I of Romania. Although the Romanian government had accepted in 1898 that the likelihood of converting the Koutsovlachs was not great, and although the conclusion of a trade pact in 1900 set the stage for closer co-operation, nonetheless the two governments could not agree on explicit terms for a common position on Macedonia. Conversely, Greek-Turkish relations improved after 1900. Despite their enormous differences, Athens and the Porte did share one common interest: preservation of the *status quo* in Macedonia. For Greece, Turkish sovereignty in Macedonia was the only guarantee against the Slav danger. This realisation soon led Greece to a rapprochement with Germany, which was also anxious to see the Ottoman Empire remain intact. For Turkey, on the other hand, friendly relations with Greece were indispensable to guard against a Balkan coalition.¹³

Although the Greek state was unable actively to promote and defend its positions on Macedonia, it was ably seconded at this critical juncture by private initiatives. After the dissolution of the *Ethniki Etaireia*, a number of uneasy patriots, not only of Macedonian origin, swelled the ranks of a variety of associations. Their role was to alert and enlighten public opinion in Greece, and to co-ordinate the defence of Greek Macedonia. Some of these societies were: Theocharis Geroiannis' 'Central Macedonian Society', Stephanos Dra-goumis' 'Macedonian Society', Neoklis Kazazis' 'Hellenism Society', and later, in 1903, the Archbishop



Pavlos Melas and his wife.

of Athens' 'Committee for Succour for the Macedonians'. Of similar outlook was the 'Committee for the Support of Greek Church and Education', which functioned under the aegis of the Foreign Ministry. Its most active members were Dimitrios Vikelas, Georgios Streit and Georgios Baltatzis, and it essentially replaced the 'Society for the Dissemination of Greek Letters' in educational activity in Macedonia. Especially in the period immediately after 1900 this committee's financial support increased dramatically. Significant work in education was also performed by the 'Greek Literary Society' and the 'Macedonian Educational Fraternity of Constantinople'. Moreover, the numerous societies and fraternities which had sprung up during the 1870s in virtually all urban and semi-urban centres in Macedonia continued their efforts for the improvement and the spread of education. It is worth noting that at the beginning of the 20th century the Greek population of Macedonia boasted more than 1,000 schools with approximately 70,000 pupils.¹⁴

Significant work was also undertaken in the period after 1900 by the Church, that is, by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which abandoned its defensive strategy in favour of a policy of re-conquest. In order to achieve this it was essential to replace certain metropolitans who, whether from lack of enthusiasm or from excessive devotion to the ideal of the 'Great Church' (which after



Germanos Karavangelis.

the catastrophe of 1897 was completely unrealistic), were unable to cope with the demands of the national struggle. They were replaced by active young prelates who were in their prime during the period of armed struggle, among them Metropolitans Germanos Karavangelis of Kastoria, Chrysostomos Kalaphatis of Drama, and Ioakeim Phoropoulos of Melenikon.¹⁵

But the activities of paedagogues and churchmen, the guarded diplomatic efforts of the Greek government and the less than remarkable abilities of many of those in the diplomatic service were unlikely to alter the balance of power in the Balkans, which was so unfavourable to Greece, unless they adopted some more energetic forms of action. The ambassador to Constantinople, Nikolaos Mavrokordatos, had indicated to the Foreign Ministry as early as January 1900 that the use of force was a matter of unassailable urgency; but the initiative behind the application of such measures was taken by Germanos Karavangelis, in the very year he was elevated to the metropolitan throne of Kastoria. Karavangelis soon inclined towards the formation of an armed corps, and more specifically towards making use of Kota, who had already quarrelled with IMRO. He also turned to other guerrilla leaders, such as Vangelis of Strebeno (Asprogeia), Karalivanos and Georgis of Negovani (Phlampouron), and his irresistible personality ensured that his efforts were crowned with success. Although the first of

these troops rarely came into open conflict with IMRO (except during the Ilinden uprising when some units directly confronted the revolutionary forces) they nevertheless served to guard the Patriarchist villages, and did succeed in causing some people to turn away from the Exarchists.¹⁶

In November 1902 Karavangelis acquired a worthy adjutant in the person of Ion Dragoumis, the son of Stephanos, who at his own request was posted to Monastir as vice-consul, where his activities far exceeded his sphere of competence. In Monastir the young diplomat founded an association called '*Amyna*' (Defence), which quickly became active in most of the principal towns and villages in Western Macedonia. Its purpose was to set up an information network and to intimidate the Bulgarians. Similar defensive organizations were established in Gevgeli, Yenitsa, Naousa, Thessaloniki and elsewhere. At this time veterans of the *Ethniki Etaireia* were beginning to pour arms into Macedonia through the good offices of certain officers in the Army Cartographic Service in Thessaly. Indeed, in response to Kara-

Georgios Dikonymos-Makris.



vangelis' constant pleas for more substantial aid, the first armed band was sent to Macedonia in May 1903 by colleagues of Stephanos Dragoumis. It consisted of eleven Cretans, including Euthymios Kaoudis and Georgios Dikonymos-Makris, and it saw action against IM-RO forces on the very first day of the Ilinden Uprising. Its eventual escape to Greece was only accomplished by the personal intervention of Karavangelis.¹⁷

2. From the Mürzteg Agreement to the Young Turk Revolution

As we have seen, the bloodshed which followed the suppression of the Ilinden Uprising once again focused international attention on the Macedonian Question. By the end of August 1903, it had become obvious that the Vienna reform programme had failed. Great Britain had early proposed a series of modifications, but the substantial revision of the programme was the result of a joint Russo-Austro-Hungarian initiative. In September 1903 the two emperors met at the Styrian city of Mürzteg. The new schedule of reforms drawn up by their Foreign Ministers was submitted to the Porte at the end of October, and one month later had been agreed in full, despite the initial reservations of the other Great Powers and Turkish attempts to reach an understanding with the Bulgarian Principality. The Porte was left with no alternative but to accept the proposals, reserving only the right to negotiate the manner of their implementation.

The principal aims of the Mürzteg agreement were the restoration of order, the reparation of damages resulting from the insurrection, and the application of the reforms agreed in the Vienna programme. Particular importance was also assigned to reinforcing the European presence in Macedonia, which was deemed of fundamental importance for its eventual success. Provision was thus made for: 1) two political advisors and liaison officers, one Russian and one Austrian, with appropriate staff, to assist Hilmi Pasha; 2) reorganization of the gendarmerie with officers and NCOs supplied by the Great Powers; 3) re-drawing the borders of the administrative districts to reflect as far as possible ethnographic distribution; 4) reorganization of the administration and justice systems with a view to decentralization and the employment of Christians; 5) the appointment of joint commissions of investigation for political and other crimes; 6) financial aid to the ravaged areas and repatriation of refugees from Bulgaria; 7) annual tax relief for the devastated villages; 8)



*Lambros
Koromilas.*

immediate implementation of the Vienna reform programme, and 9) the disbanding of all irregular military units.¹⁸

While the Great Powers were working for peace in Macedonia, the Greek government was beginning to give serious attention to the question of more dynamic and vigorous intervention in that region. The demonstration organized by the Macedonian societies on 15 August in protest against the brutality of the Turkish army had aroused public opinion and awakened the government to a sense of its tremendous responsibilities. The first decision was to proceed to a survey of Macedonia in order to ascertain whether an armed defence system could be installed. For this purpose a committee of army officers was dispatched to Western Macedonia in February 1904 (Anastasios Papoulas, Alexandros Kontoulis, Georgios Kolo-kotronis and Pavlos Melas), while the preparatory work for the other regions was undertaken by the interpreter at the Embassy in Constantinople, Georgios Tsozbatzoglou. By the summer of 1904 their work had been completed, but their



*Dimitrios Kalapothakis, editor of "Empros"
and president of the Macedonian Committee*

reports and proposals did not concur in any detail.

Although action had to be delayed, the machinery had nevertheless been set in motion. During the spring of 1904 the Foreign Ministry had begun to reorganize its consular representation in Macedonia. Dimitrios Kallergis was named consul in Monastir, and Lampros Koromilas was sent to Thessaloniki as Consul General; while at the same time the Foreign Ministry dispatched a group of officers to serve in the Greek consulates and vice-consulates in Macedonia. Further, in May 1904 some former members of the *Ethniki Etaireia* founded the 'Macedonian Committee', with the editor of the newspaper *Empros*, Dimitrios Kalapothakis, as its chairman. Its purpose was "...the defence of Hellenism in Macedonia, Thrace, Epirus and Albania against any attempt to diminish it, and the restoration to its bosom of however many villages and individuals have against their will been severed from us and against their will remain severed". Its charter indicates that right from the beginning the Committee undertook a wide range of activities, not only in reconnaissance and propaganda

but also in the funding, initiating, recruiting and initial organization of various bodies.

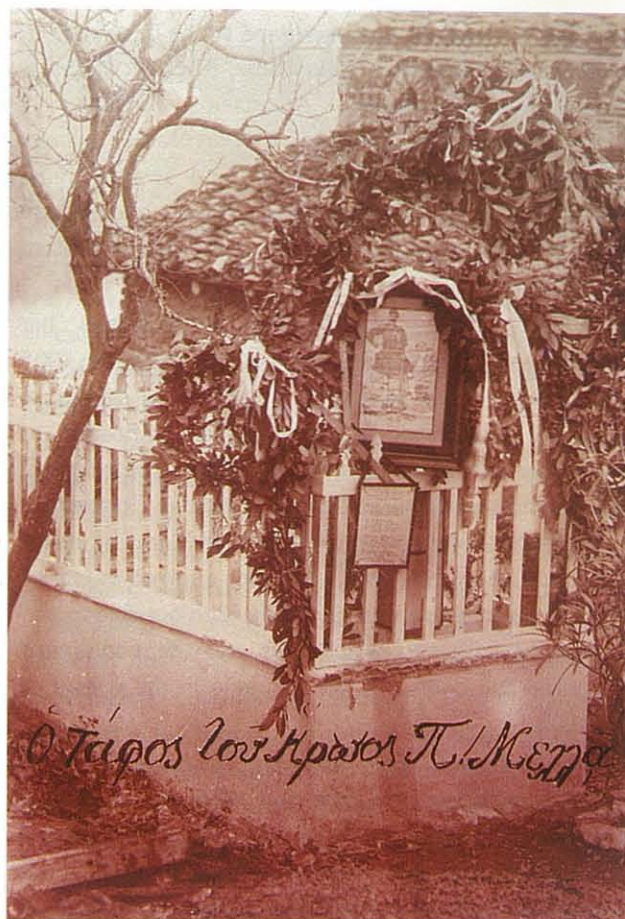
Barely four years after the dissolution of the *Ethniki Etaireia* the Greek government greeted with relief the resurgence of private initiative, which both satisfied the need for immediate action and served as cover to the state. It was obvious from the beginning, however, that complications were bound to ensue if activities were carried on by both the state and private persons at the same time. The Committee was assigned the *vilayet* of Monastir as its sphere of activity, while the Foreign Ministry assumed responsibility for the *vilayet* of Thessaloniki. In practice, however, the interests and the ambitions of the two bodies ranged far beyond the borders of their respective provinces, and in the years that followed the co-ordination of the struggle and the allotment of men and material were anything but smooth.¹⁹

While Greece was about this preparatory groundwork, the Bulgarian bands were not wasting their time either. The IMRO had, despite the disasters, managed to save a large part of its arms and explosives, although it was, of course, much less active than it had been in 1903. Although Hilmi Pasha wanted to believe that this was due to the implementation of the reform programme, a more correct interpretation would probably be that IMRO did not wish openly to undermine the reform and thus provoke the displeasure of the Great Powers. Indeed, the gendarmerie was still in the process of reorganization and so did not constitute a serious threat; it was merely serving as a sort of *locum tenens* for the interests of the Great Powers, while the work of suppressing the activity of the bands remained the responsibility of the army. Furthermore, the calm which had prevailed since the Bulgaro-Turkish rapprochement in April 1904 (and which had been condemned by the Bulgarian committees) was if anything favourable to IMRO, for it provided for a general amnesty for those arrested after the Ilinden uprising and the repatriation of refugees.

In any case, the IMRO units were by now chiefly devoted to seeking to convert the Slavophones to the Exarchate; skirmishes with the army were rare. It was this new atmosphere that inspired the ambush which resulted in the assassination of Kapetan Vangelis of Strebeno in May 1904. A few months later, a series of misunderstandings culminated in the betrayal of Kota to the Turks; he was tried, sentenced and executed in the

autumn of 1905. The void left by the loss of these two traditional chieftains, who had been the leaders of the struggle in Western Macedonia, a renewal of activity on the part of certain Serbian guerrilla bands in the north, and the new dangers arising out of Bulgaro-Romanian collaboration, that is, the adherence to the Exarchate of a significant number of villages in the median and northern zones, all contributed to render the dispatch north of Greek troops a matter of urgency.²⁰

By the end of July 1904 Athens had been convinced that the dispatch of armed men to Macedonia could no longer be delayed. In mid August three units made ready (under Georgios Bolas, Pantelis Kokkinos, and Euthymios Kaoudis) and crossed the border, but only the last was able to take any effective action. Towards the end of the month it was reinforced by the unit led by Pavlos Melas (Zezas), but it achieved little. Melas was a polite and obliging person, an idealistic and easily moved patriot; but, although perfectly willing to adopt the forms of the invaluable klephtic traditions, he was essentially unable to accept the savage rules of this unorthodox form of warfare, and so it was not long before he became a tragic hero. The letter he wrote to his wife ten days before his fatal encounter with the Turks is typical of him: "I



Pavlos Melas' tomb in a contemporary photograph.

*Kapetan
Kotas.*



had hoped for much, but the people here are terrified of the murdering *komitadjis* and for that reason do not help us as much as they should... They are willing and full of good intentions, and they come to me and enthusiastically propose all sorts of fine schemes. Poor me! I make my plans, I set off –cold, wet, hungry– and when the moment arrives either they do not come or they trick me in every possible way or they warn the Bulgarians to hide... I could have punished them, but I preferred to speak to them logically, sternly, movingly".²¹

Melas' death led to a redoubling of activity in Athens. A few days later the unit led by Georgios Katechakis (Rouvas) crossed the border, followed in mid November by that of Georgios Tsontos (Vardas). These two groups, together with Kaoudis' men, struck the first major blows at IMRO, thus restoring Greek prestige in the eyes of the people of Western Macedonia. Progress was also made in the *vilayet* of Thessaloniki under the systematic leadership of Lampros Koromilas and a group of officers

who had at intervals been assigned to the Consulate in Thessaloniki (Georgios Kakoulidis, Michail Moraitis, Konstantinos Mazarakis, Athanasios Exadakylos, Spyros Spyromilios, Dimitrios Kakkavos, and Ioannis Avrasoglou). Before the end of 1904 several units, formed mainly of local men and Cretans, had already made their presence felt both in Central and in Eastern Macedonia.²²

Winter put a temporary halt to hostilities, but preparations for the spring campaign began early in 1905 when Konstantinos Mazarakis journeyed to Athens on behalf of Koromilas. He pressed for unification of leadership under the Consul General in Thessaloniki, arguing the weaknesses of the Macedonian Committee, its spasmodic bouts of activity and problems of co-ordination. But by now the Committee enjoyed too much political patronage and sufficiently high prestige to suffer any restrictions to its activities, and it thus continued to control the course of the Struggle in the *vilayet* of Monastir.²³

Mazarakis was more successful in recruiting fresh forces. Indeed, on the Greek side 1905 was marked by intensive military activity. By May there were around nine major units campaigning in the *vilayet* of Thessaloniki, more than twelve in that of Monastir, and a host of smaller bands, mostly recruited locally, which carried out secondary missions. They had also managed to collect an impressive supply of arms and ammunition.

The most significant military event of that year was the assault on March 25 (April 7, New Style) on the overwhelmingly Exarchist village of Zagoritsani (Vasileiada), by a force of 300 men under Georgios Tsontos. The plan to encircle the village worked perfectly; and not only did Tsontos' men crush all resistance (some 79 villagers were killed), but they also repulsed a Turkish attack at the same time. One month later the units led by Georgios Katechakis, Petros Manou (Vergas), and Pavlos Gyparis successfully repulsed a massive Turkish attack near Blatsi (Oxyes). Less fortunate were the men of Nikostratos Kalo-menopoulos (Nidas) and Christos Tsolakopoulos (Rebelos), who at about the same period were entrapped by Turkish forces at Belkameni (Drosopigi) and suffered heavy losses. But in general the weight of the campaign in Western Macedonia was shouldered by Konstantinos Mazarakis (Akritas), Spyros Spyromilios (Bouas), and Manolis Katsigaris and their men; and despite betrayals from pro-Romanian Vlachs and many reverses, they were extremely success-



*Georgios Katechakis
(Kapetan Rouvas).*

ful in increasing support for the Greeks in the areas around Prilep, Monastir, Kastoria and Edessa. IMRO activity had in the meantime slackened, both because of the organization's differences with the Supreme Macedonian Committee and because the Bulgarian government was trying to suppress any activity which might endanger its good relations with the Porte.

In Central Macedonia there was less actual fighting, but tremendous efforts were made (and seconded by the local guerrilla leaders) to organize the defence of the villages and to create bases in the marshes around Giannitsa. In Eastern Macedonia the struggle was less successful. After Turkish forces had exterminated Ioannis Daphotis' band, Greek resistance was left entirely in the hands of local units, and unfortunately their opponent was the extremely capable Sadanski. In northern Macedonia the Serbian bands were continuing to preach their cause and to fight their battles, whether with Bulgarian or Turco-Albanian bands or with the Turkish army.²⁴

The Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian guerrilla bands usually avoided frontal attacks, which were counter-productive for two reasons: they wasted men, and they generally provoked the intervention of the Turkish army, usually with unpleasant consequences. All the parties were principally interested in converting to their cause

any person or village that may have displayed a certain fickleness of national attachment. Their methods, of course, were anything but peaceful. The tragic death of Pavlos Melas and the frequent betrayals and denunciations had put an end to the era of peaceful propaganda. The only guaranteed method of shaking or altering people's beliefs was systematic terrorism: arson, assassination of priests and civil leaders, blackmail and brutality of every kind were now commonplace. Other strategically important targets were the adversary's communication networks and support systems; this was a major source of conflict between the Greek bands and pro-Romanian Koutsovlachs throughout 1905. Indicative of the savagery of the struggle, especially in Western Macedonia, was the flood of emigration which began after the Ilinden uprising, although economic conditions should not be discounted. In 1905 alone some 5,500 men emigrated to America from the Monastir area, mainly from the Slav-speaking villages which were the object of heavy pressure from both sides.

The situation, meanwhile, had not escaped the attention of the Great Powers, which flooded Sofia, Athens and Belgrade with complaints of the guerrilla activity which was impeding implementation of the reform programme. The British government was particularly active throughout 1905: in its attempts to prevent Austria and Russia from being sole masters of developments in Macedonia it pressed for sterner measures and increased European presence in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The combination of the opposition of the other powers and the opportunism of the Porte sufficed to modify and delay British plans, but nonetheless, between May and November 1905 a certain number of additions and modifications to the reform programme helped considerably to curtail Ottoman sovereignty in Macedonia.²⁵

Generally speaking the military situation throughout 1906 was much what it had been the previous year. In Western Macedonia Antonios Vlachakis (Litsas) and Konstantinos Poulos (Platanos) with their men, along with a local band under Loukas Kokkinos, kept the front open through the winter months. The most significant battle of the year took place on New Year's Day, when Vlachakis and his men successfully attacked Mitros Vlachos and his band at Ezerets (Petropoulaki). In May reinforcements began to arrive for the summer campaign: Zacharias Papadas (Phouphas), Georgios Dikomyos-Makris, Georgios Volanis, Pavlos Gypris,

Georgios Kanellopoulos, Vasileios Pappas (Vrontas), Grigorios Phalireas (Ziagas) etc., with fairly large numbers of men. Once again the Greek forces found themselves fighting mainly against Turkish troops. Early in May Vlachakis attacked the Exarchist village of Osnitsani (Kastanophyton), but he was counter-attacked by a Turkish battalion and forced to retreat, with severe losses. Towards the end of the month the bands led by Volanis, Gypris and Kanellopoulos suffered heavy losses in an extremely bloody battle with a large Turkish force at Strebeno (Asprogeia); the same fate awaited Tsontos' band at Zelovo (Antartikon) in June, and those under Ioannis Karavitis and Evangelos Nikoloudis at Gomitsovo (Kelli) in July.

It is true that the massive presence of Turkish troops in Western Macedonia severely restricted the activities of the Greek guerrilla fighters, and to a certain extent inhibited the local population from supporting them. Nevertheless, such reverses are in no way indicative of what they actually accomplished in the *vilayet* of Monastir. The initiative now lay with the Greeks, who kept up their heavy pressure on the Bulgarian bands and attacked the principal *komitadjis* relentlessly. Severe damage was inflicted on the Romanian propaganda and espionage networks and on several bands of brigands. The attacks on Exarchist villages were continued, two of the most significant being those carried out by Konstantinos

Grigorios Phalireas and his band.



Goutas on Smilevo and Phalireas on Holista (Melisotopon). In other words, despite certain reverses the Greek position in Western Macedonia was strengthened, both in the countryside and in the town of Monastir.

It is however undeniable that the situation in Western Macedonia could have been even better for the Greeks if they had had a unified command. In principle, responsibility for this area belonged to the Macedonian Committee under Dimitrios Kala-pothakis, but in practice there was constant government interference, via the consulate in Monastir, both in funding and in campaign decisions. The problems caused by this dual leadership were extremely serious. A fierce battle for supremacy raged between the consular officials and the senior members of the Committee. The civil leaders of the Committee were opposed to responsibility for the Struggle being exclusively in the hands of the military; while as far as the officers were concerned, it was obvious that, given the tremendous problem of communications, operations over a constantly changing front could not possibly be conducted from Athens. Since neither side would yield, the result was that contradictory orders were issued, and that several undesirable local chieftains whose brigand activity could only embarrass the Committee, were drawn into the struggle, which then served to widen the abyss between the two sides.

The activity of the armed bands in Central and Eastern Macedonia under the aegis of the Consulate in Thessaloniki was more effective. Between May and November of 1906 about 30 raids were carried out on Exarchist villages, which enhanced Greek prestige immensely. Generally speaking, the conduct of the struggle was irreproachable, the flow of arms, men and money unimpeded, the selection of officers appropriate, discipline adequate and outrages infrequent. The systematic labours of Lampros Koromilas, who since the middle of the year had only occasionally appeared in his consulate in Thessaloniki, were bearing fruit. One of the most notable bands was that under Konstantinos Garephis, which in June 1906 completely annihilated the band led by voivode Danev, and early in August those of Karatasos and voyvod Luka. In this last battle Garephis was wounded, and he succumbed to his injuries soon afterwards. Meanwhile, the bands led by Nikolaos Rokas (Kolios) and Michail Anagnostakos (Matapas) were active against the brigands on Mt Olympus and Romanian propaganda in the area surrounding Edessa, Goumenissa and Mt Paiko, and progress was being made

in Eastern Macedonia under the guidance of the consulate in Serres. Three units patrolled the area, and civil guards were formed in various villages. Invaluable organizational assistance was provided by the Metropolitan of Drama, Chrysostomos. It should be remembered that in this region the Bulgarian party had to cope not only with Greek attacks but with the 'civil war' raging between the bands supported by the Supreme Committee and those of IMRO, while the only problem the Greeks faced in Central and Eastern Macedonia was that caused by the undisciplined behaviour of the men under Giaglis, a brigand chief enlisted by a Macedonian association in Athens called 'Alexander the Great'.

One of the most heroic pages in the story of the struggle for Macedonia was written in the marshes around Giannitsa. This area was traditionally the headquarters for the Bulgarian bands which roamed the territories of Edessa and Almopeia as well as the marsh villages. At the beginning of 1906 the Greek leaders in the marshes were Stavros Rigas (Kavodoros) and Michail Anagnostakos, who were reinforced in April by Panagiotis Papatzaneteas and Ioannis Sakellaropoulos (Zirias). Throughout the summer the Greeks tried unavailingly to dislodge the Bulgarians. When it was realized just how ideally the marsh was situated for controlling communications and the flow of arms, and in general for commanding all of Central Macedonia, fresh forces were sent out in September 1906 in order to redouble activity in this area. The bands led by Telos Agapinos (Agras), Konstantinos Sarros (Kalas) and Ioannis Demestichas (Nikiphoros) did indeed reinforce the Greek positions, but despite repeated attempts they fell short of dealing a decisive blow on the Bulgarian forces. It should be noted that besides the unwillingness of the Bulgarians to fight when they were outnumbered, operations in the marshes were further hindered by the frequent changes in leadership occasioned by malaria.

Within the city of Thessaloniki the Greek counter-attack was identified with the organizational efforts of second lieutenant Athanasios Souliotis (Nikolaidis). Souliotis was posted to Thessaloniki in March 1906, where, under the cover of a commercial agency, he very soon set up an extremely efficient network called the Organization of Thessaloniki. Its purpose was to collect information on Exarchist activity in the city, but his own activities did not end there. Between 1906 and 1908 he managed to reinforce the Greek presence in the city,



*Kapetans Kalas, Agras
and Nikiphoros in the
marshes of
Giannitsa.*

strengthen the solidarity of the Greek community, organize a small scale economic war and terrorize the Exarchists to the greatest possible degree.²⁶

An overall evaluation of military operations shows that in 1906 the situation in Macedonia had begun to favour the Greeks. The great number of active bands (more than 80 bands and 1500 men are mentioned during the summer of 1906) restored a significant number of schismatic villages to the Patriarchate. Also important is the fact that Greek losses to the Turks were far less than those of the Bulgarians, who were the Turkish army's chief target. This period also saw renewed efforts in the field of education, with the creation of nursery and primary schools in the villages which had recently been recovered. The work of the Foreign Ministry and the Committee for the Support of Greek Education and the Greek Church was supported by the Society for the Dissemination of Greek Letters and the Melas Nursery Trust.²⁷

As was only to be expected, the growth of the Greek bands and their frequent clashes with the Turkish armed forces caused the Great Powers to redouble their protests to the Greek government. Incessant strife in Macedonia was hindering the implementation of the reform programme, in spite of all the efforts being made. The flow of emigration continued, and the large landowners were unable to pay their taxes, just when the local budget had to meet the extra expense incurred by the reorganization of the gendarmerie. The Porte requested that import duties be increased from 8% to 11% in order to offset the additional costs; this was nothing less than an attempt to blackmail the Great Powers into sharing the cost of

the reforms. It was quite predictable, then, that pressure would next be put on the Greek government. The latter tried to draw the attention of the powers to Bulgarian atrocities in Macedonia, but was in the end obliged to agree to impose restraints and to check the formation of armed bands and the sale of arms. These measures were never implemented, of course, because it was obvious that the Porte did not want an open confrontation with Greece which essentially would be of benefit only to the Bulgarian Principality. On the contrary, the fact that Greek and Serbian forces were occupied with the Bulgarian rebels, at a time when their activities were becoming steadily more alarming, was all to the Turks' advantage. Meanwhile, relations between Bulgaria and the Great Powers had improved. Despite unremitting protestations from the Porte, the Europeans were nevertheless convinced that the Bulgarian government was doing all it could to control and direct the bands. Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria, in an attempt to exploit the friendly climate, went so far as to propose including in the discussions on the Cretan Question a similar settlement for Macedonia.²⁸

After the inevitable halt over the winter months, in the spring of 1907 guerrilla activity resumed on all fronts, once again drawing out the Turkish forces. In the Morihovo region the bands led by Vasileios Pappas (Vrontas), Georgios Kondylis (Zagas), Philolaos Pichion (Philotas), Dimitrios Papavierou (Gouras) and Manolis Katsigaris continued to organize the defence of the villages and harry the Bulgarian bands. In the Kastoria-Kastanochoria region Phalireas and Zacharias Papadas (Phouphas) were very active; the latter unfor-



Officers Al. Mazarakis, Kyr. Tavouliaris, Kourvelis, Kourkoulis and Exadaktylos in the garden of the Greek Consulate in Thessaloniki.

tunately was killed in April of that year in an unsuccessful raid on Palaiochori (Phoupha). Tsontas was fighting in the sector comprising Florina, Monastir, Prespes and Korestia; his attacks on the villages of Kalenik (Kaliniki) in April and Ostima (Trigonon) in June were successful, while in July, at Grentsi (Phtelia), Georgios Tompras (Roupakias) destroyed the band led by voyvod Karsakov.

Action in Central Macedonia was co-ordinated from Thessaloniki by Athanasios Exadaktylos, Dimitrios Kakkavos and Kyriakos Tavouliaris (Katsanos), and later Andreas Kourouklis (Kolyvas) and Alexandros Othonaios (Palmidis). The struggle in the marshes of Giannitsa continued relentlessly all winter, despite the exceptionally severe weather. In the spring Demestichas and his band undertook impressive campaigns in the surrounding area, including important raids on Bozets (Athyra) and Kouphalia in March. Fighting in this region came to an end the following month, however, when Turkish operations drove both the Greeks and the Bulgarians out of the marshes. Meanwhile, Dimitris Kosmopoulos (Kourbesis) managed to keep the Bulgarians in check in Chalcidice.

The progress of the Greek national forces was less spectacular in Eastern Macedonia. The imprisonment of cavalry lieutenant Dimitrios Vardis, the removal of the metropolitan of Drama, Chrysostomos and the vice-consul of Kavala, the restrictions placed on the free move-

ment of the metropolitan of Serres, Grigorios, and the consul, Antonios Sachtouris, were so many checks; some local units did nonetheless continue their raids on a small scale, and a remarkable number of villages were recovered for the Patriarchate.

Of course, as happened every year, there were clashes with Turkish troops which were usually catastrophic for the Greeks. In June the bands led by Phalireas, Tompras and Papavierou encountered a large Turkish force outside Lehovo, but they managed to avoid encirclement and to inflict serious losses. Phalireas was less fortunate one month later when his band, along with that led by Nikolaos Tsotakos (Germa), was trapped in the Kalogeriko gorge near Losnitsa (Germa) and decimated: only eight men (including Phalireas) managed to escape. That same month the band led by Andreas Makoulis (a chieftain from Stenimachos) was annihilated at Dovista, and in August another chieftain, Pantelis Papaioannou, or Graikos, was killed in a skirmish with a strong Turkish detachment near Stromnitsa.

Nor were things easier for the Bulgarians that year. Not only were they being incessantly and severely pounded by Greek and Serbian units, but there was no respite in the friction between IMRO and the Supreme Macedonian Committee, friction which often flared into open conflict and to which Sarafov himself fell a victim. After the death of Gruev, however, the influence of the Supreme Committee within IMRO increased sharply.

Large numbers of local chieftains, dismayed at IMRO's collapse, began to attach themselves to the Greek party, while continued emigration to the New World curtailed recruitment from among the peasants. In the course of such negotiations Agras fell into an ambush, and was hanged near Edessa. Then too, especially in Western Macedonia, a considerable number of the leading *komitadjis* were eliminated, whether by Greek or by Turkish forces, leaving a gap which was very hard to fill.

These developments in Macedonia were anything but encouraging for Bulgaria's foreign policy, which slowly began to become more conciliatory. The Greek government, on the other hand, continued all through 1907 to be swamped by protests from Turkey and the Great Powers, especially Great Britain. Despite all the nimble manoeuvring by Foreign Minister Alexandros Skouzes, it was evident that Greece had neither the desire nor the power to check the activities of the various bodies in Macedonia. In the summer of 1907 the Theotokis government tried to deflect the menace of diplomatic isolation which was hanging over his country by proposing an alliance with Great Britain and France, but his efforts came to nothing. When in September 1907 Russia and Austria-Hungary joined Britain and Turkey in their league against Greece, it was no longer possible to ignore the pressure, and the Theotokis government proclaimed abatement of Greek efforts in Macedonia a matter of necessity. The Foreign Ministry, on the other hand, began to pay more serious attention to identifying and solving chronic problems in education, such as subject matter, curriculum, teachers' qualifications, inspection, etc.²⁹

Curtailling military activity, however, was only one aspect of the problem. The divergence between the Committee and the consulate in Thessaloniki had developed into an open breach. The final removal of Koromilas, in response to Turkish pressures, and his posting to the United States, did facilitate matters, as he had been the Committee's principal vindicator. It appears that the Theotokis government even considered conceding direct responsibility in both *vilayets* to the Committee, which would certainly have improved its position *vis-à-vis* the Great Powers. The officers attached to the consulate in Thessaloniki, however, had a different point of view. Besides their objections to certain plans of action and their solid scorn for politicians and journalists who gave orders from afar, these officers felt embittered by the partiality displayed by the Com-



Theodoros Askitis, interpreter at the Greek Consulate in Thessaloniki. He was assassinated in 1908.

mittee, which had often led to able officers being passed over. The officers attached to the centre in Thessaloniki did not want to oppose the government's wishes completely, and so an alternative solution was proposed: that Colonel Panagiotis Daglis be named head of this new section.

Indeed, in mid February 1908, Daglis was summoned to assume the direction of the eastern division, with full powers and with the mandate to reconcile the Committee and the officers. In the meanwhile, during the course of the winter, the dwindling away of the Greek guerrillas and the increased activity of the Bulgarians had created serious problems. Bulgarian enterprise reached its climax with the murder on February 22 of Theodoros Askitis, the interpreter attached to the consulate in Thessaloniki. With the arrival of Greek reinforcements in the early weeks of the spring and their resumption of the

offensive, the losses were no longer so one-sided; and in any case, with the exception of the Serres region, the fighting was not as frequent as it had been in previous years. Despite all the problems he had to face and his repeated requests to resign his post, Dagleis was able to maintain Greek support in Macedonia unabated at a very critical juncture. Because of the pressure exerted by the Committee, however, and despite the support of the officers attached to his sector, he was unable to establish a paramilitary service answerable only to the government and the Army High Command; for this reason he refused all responsibility for the actions of the Committee and ceased to attend its meetings.³⁰

3. From the Young Turks to the First Balkan War

The success of the Young Turk Revolution created a whole new situation in Macedonia. After the rebellion of the 3rd and the 2nd Army Corps and the complete ascendancy of the paramilitary Committee of Union and Progress, Sultan Abdul Hamid II was forced on 11 July 1908 to promise a constitution and grant an amnesty. The result was that the vast majority of the amnestied rebels moved into the cities, and the Bulgarian and Greek bands disintegrated. By the end of the month 26 Greek bands with a total of 217 men, 55 Bulgarian bands (707 men), and 340 Albanian brigand fugitives had definitively laid down their arms.³¹

This new state of affairs coupled with the imminence of elections for the Ottoman parliament quickly transformed the former guerrilla chiefs into party leaders. Vlahov, Sadanski and Panicha's short-lived Federal People's Party held its constituent assembly on August 15 1908 in Thessaloniki. Although Sadanski wanted Macedonia to rebel and declare its independence immediately, the party eventually adopted a more conciliatory stance, though one still befitting the radical socialism which distinguished it. Its demands included: administrative decentralization and autonomy, no discrimination against religious minorities, nationalization of mines and railways, compulsory education, universal franchise, and the redistribution of large estates. It proved more difficult for the remaining members of IMRO to agree on a common platform. After extensive discussions on the local level, a congress met in September in Thessaloniki which proposed the following: revision of the constitution based on the primacy of national rights, freedom of conscience, press and educa-

tion, provincial parliaments, preservation of religious privileges, changes to the electoral law, reform of the justice system, etc. The Greek party presented a united front. In its memorandum the Greek community in Thessaloniki urged a variety of economic, administrative and legal reforms, and stressed the necessity both for the Greek community to remain a distinct society and for the Patriarchate to retain its prerogatives untouched. It was evident that neither the Greeks nor the Bulgarians were disposed to forget the religious aspect of their struggle and allow themselves to be swallowed up in the racial equality proclaimed by the Young Turks.³²

For the Greek government, the establishment of a strong constitutional regime in Turkey signalled the end of the immediate threat of a premature collapse which might have found the Greek army unprepared to take advantage of the opportunity thus presented. On the other hand, however, it was by no means certain that the gains in Macedonia would be pre-served once the Greek bands were no longer there. On the contrary, it was extremely doubtful that the Greek population could survive guarded only by peaceful means. Moreover, it soon appeared that IMRO was determined to exploit the situation to its own advantage. In August it began to re-arm the Exarchist peasants and to step up propaganda; meanwhile, many of the *komitadjis* who had been held in Turkish prisons were released. By October the local bands had resumed their activities.

By now the creation of an organization in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire, at least in those where Greece had vital interests, was a matter of considerable urgency. Agents such as Ion Dragoumis, Athanasios Souliotis and Panagiotis Dagleis were sounding the alarm, and eventually they convinced the Foreign Minister Georgios Baltatzis of the necessity of this step. And so was founded the Panhellenic Organization, a paramilitary service under the direction of Dagleis which set up special offices to furnish arms and economic support to the Greek population and to undertake nationalist propaganda. Some 75 officers and NCOs, all reliable veterans of the Struggle, joined its ranks and offered their services either as consular employees and agents or military leaders.

The work of the organization, however, did not proceed unimpeded. In the Epirus sector the parallel activity of the Epirotic Society caused serious misunderstandings. In Constantinople the Constantinople Society, founded by Dragoumis and Souliotis,

did what it could to preserve its autonomy. Finally, in Macedonia, Kalapothakis' Committee continued unremittingly to undermine Dagleis and his work in an attempt to avenge its supersession. Additional problems were created by the dissatisfaction of many members at the unfair and limited rewards offered to the veterans. The major obstacle, however, was the steady pressure from the Young Turks for the removal of all Greek officers, pressure which, after the publication of certain compromising letters about Greek activity in Macedonia, became an unveiled threat of war. Early in the summer the Theotokis government, anxious to avoid an inopportune clash with the new regime, pushed forward a scheme to strip all the special offices of the Organization in the Monastir area. A few weeks later the government of Dimitrios Rallis, in an attempt to defuse a new crisis of the Cretan Question, ordered and effected the removal of all officers and NCOs from Macedonia. The return of all these disgruntled soldiers, who had seen their activities curtailed and all they had fought for years thrown away, accelerated the process which culminated in the coup at Goudi and the fall of the Rallis government. The Panhellenic Organization was itself formally dissolved in November 1909.³³

In the meanwhile, the situation in Macedonia had changed after the disappointment of the elections and the sultan's coup in March 1909. While the Greek officers were being withdrawn, the Young Turks were hardening their stand. In July 1909 a parliamentary resolution put an end to the activity of the civilian nationalist societies. As the interventions of the Great Powers lessened, the high-handedness of the Young Turks increased. The intensification of Turkish nationalism provoked IMRO to fresh activity, in order to excite European interest. In the autumn of 1910, in their attempt to bring IMRO to heel, the Turks even made use of Sadanski and his men, who at that time were preaching autonomy for Macedonia within the Ottoman Empire. The battles between IMRO and the army continued all through 1911 and 1912. It seems too that Austria-Hungary took a hand in the game at this point, with support for the Bulgarian bands. The situation worsened sharply after the Albanian rebellion in 1912 and Albanian collaboration with the Bulgarian bands in the Monastir area. In view of this generalization of the fighting, armed bands began to assemble in Greece in August 1912, and, under the command of Anagnostakis, Papatzaneteas, Alexandros Zannas and others, they crossed into Macedonia late in

September. These new arrivals not only facilitated the operations of the regular army but also conducted operations of their own in several areas around Chalcidice, Nigrita and Pravi (Eleutheroupolis).³⁴

In conclusion one could say that the military activities of both the Greeks and the Bulgarians in Macedonia were organized to the same pattern, adapted to the current political necessity and the demands of a peculiar and unorthodox war. Fear of an unexpected martial confrontation with the Ottoman Empire in an exceptionally uncertain diplomatic context induced both countries to pursue a fairly discreet policy, if one overlooks the situation in Macedonia. This policy, of course, favoured the formation of patriotic committees, which took over the irredentist campaigns of both countries. Although the activity of these committees certainly served the long term interests of both the Bulgarians and the Greeks, co-operation between government and individual nevertheless proved exceptionally difficult and often imperilled the outcome of the national enterprise. The soaring prestige of irredentism in the young Balkan states and its corresponding political support lent the committees such power and prestige that the legitimate governments hesitated to curb them, even though they held their purse strings.

Irredentism without the support of the military was of course impossible. Both the Bulgarian Principality and the Kingdom of Greece had a surfeit of officers eager to abandon the inactivity of the barracks and seek glory, honours and dignities, to write pages of heroism and self-sacrifice, and at the same time to seek to advance their own future. Their bands were composed not only of Macedonian refugees and seasonal labourers, but also of volunteers from many places, often fellow villagers from their own villages. Greece also had an exceptionally effective militia in its border guards, who were always ready for a raid on their neighbour.

Even more important than the contribution of the officers was that made by the local chieftains, brigands and nomads. Survival in an unfamiliar mountain area, in exceptionally severe weather conditions, and at the same time to prosecute the struggle on many fronts was impossible for any corps, Bulgarian or Greek. First the Bulgarians and then the Greeks realized that the affiliation of local brigand bands would confer an enormous advantage. Thus, a considerable number of brigand bands were enlisted in this national conflict, reinforcing the units with men in fine fighting condition, passing on



*Celebrations in the streets of Thessaloniki
on the occasion of the Young Turks' proclamation
of the Constitution in 1909.*

their invaluable experience of guerrilla warfare, and keeping the front open throughout the winter. Of course, the engagement of these traditional rejecters of law and order could often get out of hand. Many of them were unable to abandon their old habits: they robbed, they made deals with the enemy, and their activities often jeopardized the efforts of the Greek and Bulgarian nationalists in the eyes of the local population. This also explains the frequent clashes between the brigands and the guerrillas. In any event, the importance of the brigands became particularly obvious when they began gradually to abandon IMRO in its decay and adhere to the Greek party.

Equally important was the employment of the nomads. Their assistance was essential for bivouacking, succouring the wounded, marching, provisioning, and helping whatever units had the courage to brave the severe Western Macedonian winter to see it through. They were also invaluable in collecting and passing on information in a struggle where early information and precise knowledge of the ground could be decisive. This was why raids on nomad camps were not infrequent: their perpetrators were assured of supplies at no cost while at the same time paralysing their opponents' support system.

As far as operations were concerned, Greek and Bulgarian methods were identical. They relied on eliminating their opponents' informers, organizing civil guards to defend their villages, severe reprisals against villages, terrorism against individuals, especially local notables, teachers and priests, betrayal of enemy bands to the Turkish authorities and blockading certain sensitive areas. Open battles between Greek and Bulgarian bands were rare all during the struggle, much rarer than those with Turkish forces.³⁵

Despite all the similarities between the conduct of the Greek and Bulgarian bands, there was one essential difference which effectively decided the struggle for supremacy in Macedonia. The Greek side had the overwhelming majority of the local population behind them, and an extremely vigorous system of education. This essentially was what enabled the Greeks, within a short space of time, to organize their defences, consolidate their support, neutralize Bulgarian operations over a lengthy period, and counter-attack decisively and victoriously.



BASIL K. GOUNARIS
THE MACEDONIAN STRUGGLE
1903-1912 PAVING THE WAY
FOR LIBERATION
NOTES

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